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An autorickshaw driver with breads hanging from his neck during a rally against inflation in Lahore, Pakistan on Sunday

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PAKISTAN IS ALREADY BANKRUPT, CONFESSES ITS DEFENCE MINISTER

The much-talked-about debt default has already happened, defence minister Khawaja Asif said at an event in Sialkot

ASIF BLAMES ESTABLISHMENT FOR THE MESS

"You must have heard that Pakistan is going bankrupt or that a default or meltdown is taking place. It (default) has already taken place. We are living in a bankrupt country," Asif was quoted as saying by Pakistan media. He blamed the establishment, bureaucracy and politicians, and claimed that law and Constitution are not followed in Pakistan

'IMF CAN'T SOLVE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS'

■ Asif said the solution to Pakistan's economic crisis lies within and not with the IMF. He claimed the country could service 25% of its debt by just selling two expensive golf courses built on government land
■ As IMF bailout talks hit roadblocks, Pakistan last week hiked petrol prices by a whopping 22 rupees a litre, which may further fuel inflation

\$3 billion

IS THE CURRENT SIZE OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

INDIA SHOW NO MERCY

Rohit Sharma & Co beat Australia by six wickets and take lead 2-0 in four-Test series on Sunday. The hosts will retain Border-Gavaskar Trophy

More than half of Australia's batting line-up, including Steve Smith, Matt Renshaw, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins and Matt Kuhnemann, perished to either sweep or reverse sweep

Starting their day with 62-run lead with nine wickets in hand, the Aussies added just 52 runs. Chasing 115 runs, the hosts overhauled the target losing four wickets

NEXT TWO TESTS
Indore (March 1-5)
Ahmedabad (March 9-13)

Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja picked seven wickets, while R Ashwin three to restrict Australia to just 113 runs in the second innings and help India secure a convincing win in New Delhi yet again



VIRAT'S 25K

Virat Kohli became the sixth and the fastest batter in the world to score 25,000 runs across all formats on Sunday

KL Rahul retained

Out of form batter KL Rahul has been given another chance to prove himself as the selectors named him in the squad for the next two Tests and ODIs. Injured Jasprit Bumrah doesn't figure in either of the teams

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US warns of sanctions if China sends arms to Russia



Hot air

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi slammed the US for shooting down its 'spy' balloon early this month, terming it "unbelievable and almost hysterical"

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on Saturday confronted his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during talks on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference and made it clear that any material support to Russia will attract US sanctions.

China has so far avoided sending lethal weapon systems to Russia. However, in an interview with a US television network on Sunday, Blinken said based on the information the US has, China is now considering providing "lethal support", which he said would include "everything from ammunition to the weapons

themselves."

"He told Wang then that if China provides material support to Russia or assistance with systemic sanctions evasion, there will be consequences," a US official said.

In recent months, Russia suffered a series of setbacks with Ukraine managing to wrest back vast swathes of territory thanks to western arms. If China sends lethal weapons now, it may help Russia turn the tables again.

During the encounter, Blinken also called out China for its "irresponsible act" of sending a balloon over the US airspace, and in unequivocal terms, made it clear that it must not happen again.

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Faith-healing HOLDS SWAY IN THE UNDERBELLY OF SOCIETY

TNIE takes a look at how spiritual intervention is preferred by many to modern medicines out of sheer faith of being cured at a much lower cost | P7

No Opposition unity without our leadership, says Congress

Targets Trinamool, says the GOP is not 'double-faced' while fighting the BJP

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

WELCOMING Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's call to take the lead in forging an alliance of opposition parties to defeat the BJP in 2024, the Congress on Sunday said the party is already on the job, adding that no opposition unity is possible without its active participation.

The upcoming Congress plenary session will deliberate on Opposition unity, said Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh. The plenary session in Chhattisgarh's Nava Raipur will start from February 24 and is expected to be attended by 15,000 delegates.

On Saturday Nitish Kumar had said he was waiting for a signal from the Congress to bring Opposition parties together. Kumar said the BJP would not be able to cross 100 seats in the 2024 polls if the opposition parties fight together.

While reacting to Nitish, the Congress also took potshots at some of the opposition parties such as the Trinamool for not being on the same page. "We

know our role very well. We don't need to give a certificate to anyone to take the lead role. Because, any attempt towards Opposition unity will be unsuccessful without Congress," said Ramesh, claiming that the Congress is the only party that never had an alliance with the BJP.

He also accused certain opposition parties of siding with the BJP on critical issues. "Some parties were in agreement with us in demanding a JPC inquiry into the Adani issue. But, some of them demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe. That is a political move to save PM Modi from the crisis," said Ramesh, while addressing a press conference here on Sunday.

AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said the party has already taken the initiative by inviting like-minded political parties during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. "Certainly, the Congress will play a bigger role as suggested by Nitish Kumar," he said, adding: "Our main job is to lessen the numbers of the BJP."

Buzz on Tharoor's entry into CWC

CYNTHIA CHANDRAN @ T'Puram

A day after Shashi Tharoor hinted that he may reconsider his decision not to run for the Congress Working Committee if elections are held, party sources said he may be made a special invitee to the party's top decision-making body.

Tharoor, who had said earlier that he would not contest CWC elections, said on Saturday, "I'm waiting for an official declaration... There could be a change in the stand according to the party's decision."

Congress national general secretary K C Venugopal was also non-committal on the issue. "Wait and see," was his cryptic reply when asked about the Thiruvananthapuram MP's prospects of getting nominated to CWC.

Battling for Tharoor, a senior Congress leader told this newspaper that the party cannot sideline him anymore. "The leadership is aware of his clout among the youth and apolitical people in the state and across the country." The leader added that Tharoor would have got into the CWC without any problem had he stood within the party framework. "He had held the edge among Congress leaders from the state. But his much-publicised meetings with various community leaders played spoilsport."

Sources said senior leader Ramesh Chennithala is likely to get a berth in the CWC.

Govt in a fix as IGP Roopa, Sindhuri fight

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

TWO senior women bureaucrats - IPS officer Roopa D Moudgil and IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri - have locked horns and have indulged in a slugfest, putting the state government in an embarrassing position. IGP Roopa, on her social media account, made a series of allegations against Sindhuri, while the latter stated that the IPS officer had lost her mental balance and she would file a case against her.

Referring to a news report that Sindhuri had met M.L.A. Sa Ra Mahesh, who had made several allegations against her when she was serving as Mysuru deputy commissioner, to strike a compromise, Roopa questioned Sindhuri why did she meet the M.L.A. and what she was trying to conceal? In a lengthy post on her social media profile, the IPS officer stated that though there were several allegations against Sindhuri, there was no investigation.

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